

National Catholic Theater Conference

PRODUCTION CALENDAR

Vol. 4

November 1944

No. 2.

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PLAY ANALYSIS: "THE SONG OF BERNADETTE"

CHOOSING THE CHRISTMAS PLAY

Plays honoring Christmas are the warp of Catholic Drama groups. The choice may range from the annual performance of "The Saint Joseph College Play for the Season of Christ's Nativity" in Latin by Queens' Company, to Rosary College's student-original, but everywhere those whose form of expression is the theater will try to express through theater the particular joy that is Christmas.

For new groups and those who have not a traditional play or pageant, the following list of titles may hold suggestions. Those starred are in our library:

Full length plays for adult groups: "Tidings Brought to Mary" by Paul Claudel (Ms.*), and Philip Barry's "Joyous Season."* Gheon's "Christmas on the Village Square,"* which runs 1 hr. 25. min., has been chosen for our December play analysis sheet. And for younger groups, Kate Douglas Wiggin's "The Birds Christmas Carol."*

In Sheed & Ward's "Medieval and Tudor Plays" are the Second Shepherd's Play of the Wakefield Cycle and the Incarnation from the Hegge Ms.

Father Talbot, S.J., has a collection of short scenes "Shining in Darkness"* from which may be taken the Nativity Sequence.

"Holy Night"* by Sierra and Henry Van Dyke's "The Other Wise Men" are under full length, though the latter has three acts. (Continued on Page 4.....)

- DRAMATICS - ACADEMY OF THE HOLY ANGELS
By Sister Charitas, C.S.J.

Since the opening of the Academy of the Holy Angels, Dramatics has had a place in curricular and extra-curricular activities of our students. In this program we are attempting to meet the challenge of their interest and eagerness for artistic achievement by planting the knowledge and appreciation that will determine the Catholic Theater of the future. We want that theater to be worthy of the Catholic sanctuary in which it was born: if we can increase its audience, we shall feel rewarded.

Practically, work is graded on five levels; these classes meet twice weekly, and part of each session is devoted to voice and body technique with rehearsals (at which an assistant-director handles physical chores) scheduled after dismissal as production nears. Choral speaking is introduced in Freshman and Sophomore classes, principles of acting and production are emphasized in Junior and Senior groups, though some experience is given on lower levels as a medium of freeing the student and building up confidence in his own ability. This year the Junior's offering "I Have Five Daughters" ("Pride and Prejudice") and "Angelica, Inc." with its elaborate fashion show, to be presented by the Seniors, supply incentive for historical research and costume design.

Space allows only a recital of other programs scheduled: Initiation of National Thespian Honor Society candidates; evening of one-act plays by new students: Dickens' "Christmas Carol" by the Sophomores; three one-act patriotic plays; and the Freshman entertainment of 300 parochial school 8th graders next April.

Over and above the performances of the Dramatic Classes four general assemblies are held during the year. The aim of these is creative, educational enjoyment, and selection of theme, material and participants is made by All-School Officers and Presidents of each class after discussion with the Dramatic or Activities Director. For example, the Seniors this year have chosen Pearl Harbor Day for their Assembly; the medium is to be radio; original sketches are now being prepared. Other assemblies are conducted by Music, Home Ec. etc., Depts.

The year's last program will be our so-called Class Play. In this our girls will share honors with boys from a nearby Catholic school in the next best drama to "Murder in a Nunnery," for our 1943 offering.

STAGING "THE SONG OF BERNADETTE"
By Walter Kerr

Despite the scope of its materials, The Song of Bernadette is comparatively easy to stage. It has been constructed with precisely this in mind. The emphasis has focused upon characters and narrative development; at no time is the effectiveness of a scene dependent upon its physical background. The illusion is quite complete with occasional tables and chairs, a small rock in the grotto scene, etc., whereas the intrusion of detailed sets would slow down the flow of the ten scene (each relatively show) and perhaps detract from the spiritual luminosity which a good acting company can give it.

The very most that should ever be done in the way of settings, I think, is the use of projected backgrounds with strong lines and very little details in the manner of the Catholic University production. These are swiftly changed, physically unintrusive, and can be executed without great difficulty. Groups interested in adopting this method may write Mr. Ralph Brown, designer, Catholic University Theater, at Washington for information since the device is a new one and his own.

From the director's point of view, far more important than settings, I think, is the matter of acting level or 'tone.' Because Bernadette Soubirous has now been canonized, the initial feeling of the company will no doubt be one of great reverence and piety. This is, of course, precisely right for devotion to the saint herself. But, in attempting to produce her life story on the stage, it must be recalled that, when she first told of her visions no one credited them: not her family; certainly not Dean Peyremale. The mood of the early scenes (in fact nearly two-thirds of the play) therefore ought to be one of hard, matter-of-fact reality. The actors must characterize the disbelief of Bernadette's contemporaries rather than the belief which is their own today. Only in this way will the play have strength and meaning. This is particularly true of Dean Peyremale, who must at no time be confused with Barry Fitzgerald; it is his final but long-delayed acceptance in the last act which provides the real climax of the piece.

And watch Bernadette. Remember that for a very long time she did not herself know who the Lady was. And that she had no feeling of her own sanctified destiny.

TITLE: The Song of Bernadette

HISTORY: Jean and Walter Kerr's dramatization of Franz Werfel's novel of the same name, first produced at Catholic University Theater, Washington, July 26 -- Aug. 1, 1944, under the direction of Mr. Kerr and Dr. Josephine Callan.

EVALUATION: Excellent telescoping of events to present the miraculous story of Bernadette with a minimum cast. All aspects of the book are touched upon, but several are trimmed considerably: the lengthy discussion of 19th Century French naturalism is cut to a brief scene in the Mayor's office, and scientific proof of the cures is supplied by a sympathetic doctor; Sister Marie Therese Vausous, the school teacher in the first scene, appears at the end to add her testimony, but the dramatic version has softened the incident as it appeared in the motion picture, making her more credible to 20th Century Americans: Antoine's interest is limited to that of a sympathetic believer; barricading of the grotto is reduced to police supervision during the scene when the spring is found.

SYNOPSIS: With the exception of the final scene, the action covers 18 days, moving swiftly from introduction of Bernadette in her schoolroom to the first grotto vision. In Sc. 3 we meet her mother and father (poor managers but with an immense trust in respectable obscurity) and their neighbors, including the mother of the paralytic baby later cured. Bernadette's God-mother arrives in Sc. 4 to take affairs in hand. Act II: Town officials threaten Bernadette and take her first statement of her vision: Bernadette goes to Dean Peyremale to deliver the Lady's message and then come the two grotto scenes of the spring, and the sequel of its cures. Following are two brief scenes, Act III, in Bernadette's home with the Dean, and at the Convent ten years later.

TYPE: Biographical drama, 1858-1868; three acts and ten scenes.

CHARACTERS: 7 Men, 11 Women, and Extras

SETS: Act I: Schoolroom, Grotto, and (Sc 3 and 4) Bernadette's home;
Act II: Mayor's Office, Dean's Garden, and (Sc 3 & 4) Grotto;
Act III: Bernadette's home, and Convent at Nevers.

PRODUCTION: (Cf. Walter Kerr's column "Staging The Song of Bernadette" in November Production Calendar). Script recommends use of curtains throughout with change of scene indicated by simple properties. Grotto scenes are simplified by Bernadette's facing right front for vision - the niche being located over heads of audience, and publishers urge that scenes be done this way. Suggestions given to mask digging of the spring, and other helps for groups with minimum staging facilities. At CU backgrounds were projected on a screen.

AUDIENCE: Ideal for parish and educational theater.

PUBLISHER: Dramatic Publishing Company, 59 East Van Buren St., Chicago 5, Ill., control amateur acting rights. This dramatization is published by special arrangement with Franz Werfel. Play copies: 75¢, Royalty: 15 percent of gross receipts with minimum charge of \$25. and maximum of \$50. for each performance.

THE SONG OF BERNHARDETTA

HISTORY: John and Walter Kerr's dramatization of Franz Werfel's novel of the same name, first produced at Catholic University Theater, Washington, July 28 and Aug. 1, 1944, under the direction of Mr. Kerr and Dr. Josephine Callan.

EVALUATION: Excellent telescoping of events to present the atmospheric story of Bernharetta with a minimum cast. All aspects of the book are condensed upon, but several are trimmed considerably. The lengthy discussion of 19th Century French nationalism is cut to a brief scene in the Mayor's office, and Marie Therese's proof of the curse is supplied by a sympathetic doctor. Marie Therese's school teacher in the first scene, appears at the end to add her testimony, but the dramatic version has followed the finished as it appeared in the motion picture, making her more sympathetic to 20th Century Americans. Antoine's interest is limited to that of a sympathetic believer; parading of the curse is reduced to police supervision during the scene when the spring is found.

SYNOPSIS: With the exception of the final scene, the action covers 16 days, moving swiftly from introduction of Bernharetta in her schoolroom to the first grave vision. In Act I we meet her mother and father (poor peasants), but with an immense trust in respectable obscurity and their neighbors, including the mother of the paralytic baby later cured. Bernharetta's Godmother arrives in Act I to take estate in hand. Act II: from off-stage a greater Bernharetta and take her first statement of her vision. Bernharetta goes to Bern Forester to deliver the lady's message and then some the two grave scenes of the spring, and the sequel of its curse. Following are two brief scenes, Act III, in Bernharetta's home with the dead, and at the convent ten years later.

TYPE: Psychological drama, 1885-1905; three acts and ten scenes.

CHARACTERS: 7 Men, 11 Women, and 2 Boys

SCENES: Act I: Schoolroom, Grave, and (Sc 2 and 4) Bernharetta's home; Act II: Mayor's Office, Bern's Garden, and (Sc 3 & 4) Grave; Act III: Bernharetta's home, and Convent at Nevers.

PRODUCTION: (Cf. Walter Kerr's column "Singing the Song of Bernharetta" in November and for new Production Calendar). Script recommends use of certain throughout with change of scene indicated by simple properties. Grave scenes are also given (and not) played by Bernharetta's facing right front for vision - the niche being located over heads of audience, and publisher urge that scene be done this way. Suggestions given to make digging of the spring, and other helps for groups with minimum staging facilities. At 100 backwoods were projected on a screen.

AUDIENCE: Ideal for parish and educational theater.

PUBLISHER: Dramatic Publishing Company, 55 East Van Buren St., Chicago 4, Ill.

REMARKS: Contracted amateur acting rights. This dramatization is published by special arrangement with Franz Werfel. Play copied by V&A, Royalties 15 per cent of gross receipts with minimum charge of \$25. and maximum of \$50. for each performance.

Chicago - Oct. 31: Rosary College ushers in November's program with "First Lady." Sister M. Gregory, O.P., writes that they were tempted to produce it after seeing the excellent job done at CU on "Ah Wilderness." The good comedy and rich satire of "First Lady" have withstood the whisk-broom.

New York - Nov. 2--19, eves. only: Blackfriars' Guild launches its 4th season on 57th Street with a comedy "Don't George" written by a 21-year old Philadelphia swing-shifter who is making her first trip to New York for the opening. As usual two private matinees are being given for the Religious preceding public performances.

Chicago - Nov. 5: An evening of one-act plays at Mundelein College: "The Romancers" by Rostand, "The Hour Glass" by Yeats, Magdalene Kessie's "The Princess with the Shiny Nose," and a new comedy "Did You See Mink?"

Joliet, Ill. - Nov. 12-13: The Little Theater stage at College of St. Francis turns into "Quality Street," while mechanics set up a new radio studio in another part of the Speech Building.

Springfield, Ill. - Nov. 12-13: Little Theater of Springfield Junior College opens its 15th season with "Junior Miss" Leon White directing. The Players ask their ticket buyers to help select from among 9 possibles their next production. Marlborough, Mass. - Nov. 14-15: Our Lady's Dramatic Club in "Career Angel."

Detroit - Nov. 19--26: "The Far-Off Hills" by the adult players of Catholic Theater of Detroit, and "Rip Van Winkle" by the Children's Stage.

Davenport, Iowa: Marycrest Players have chosen Emmet Lavery's "Brief Music" for their opener, and "Big Charlie" as the girls insist on calling Mr. Costello has a new technical assistant, Miss Humphreys.

FINAL SCORES ?

Chicago, Oct. 19 - Dramatic Pub. Co. reports more back-orders for "The Song of Bernadette" from Non-Catholic than Catholic groups, with many requests from public high schools.

Dubuque, Iowa, Oct. 22 - Premiere of Rev. James Donohue's "The Wranglers," adapted from Racine's "Les Plaideurs," provides the fireworks for the start of Loras College players' season. Three other plays and two lectures included in the bargain subscription of \$2.40.

Close to the old Guild tradition of the Miracle Plays, Halifax Nova Scotia Mission Crusaders have planned a "Pageant of Priesthood." Five episodes will be performed in turn by five colleges and high schools. A copy of the "Pageant" has been donated to the library by Sister Maura author, together with her two 'prayer plays': "The Angelus" and "The Apostles Creed," both of which are published by Ave Maria Press.

Two Seventh Graders at St. Mary Academy, Monroe, Mich., wrote and presented a Feast Day Skit in Reverend Mother Teresa's honor.

We hear belatedly of four enthusiastically received performances of Felix Doherty's "Song Out of Sorrow" by an amateur Catholic theater group of Melbourne, Australia.

...And of a Tenth Birthday Party for "First Legion" with many of the actors playing in it here and abroad, including Charles Coburn and Pedro de Cordoba, on hand to celebrate with Emmet Lavery. Mr. Lavery is solo nominee for Presidency of the Screen Writers Guild.

A novel performance of "The Cradle Song" was given at Immaculate Heart College, Los Angeles, last July, by the members of Joseph Rice's summer Play Production course. The Sisters in the play were real Sisters, and so were the technicians and business managers. With the experiment a great success, Mr. Rice is already hunting for next summer's title. In conjunction with their study of Sierra's play, Paramount arranged for a special showing of the film made in 1933.

Bill Ahearn, Detroit's Francis Thompson has been helping NY Blackfriars' prepare for their current show. Terry Little, ex-Detroiter, has won a part in the new Lawrence Stallings play "The Streets Are Guarded," which John Haggott is staging.

At Mount Marty Junior College Sister M. Jeannette, O.S.B., and Sister M. Leonarde, O.S.B., divide directing and technical chores of production. Seniors are now at work on Kristin Laurence's adaptation of "Little Women" for all-girl cast, and the Juniors will be assisted by the members of the 1-4 Grade Model School conducted by the College, in their production of "The Birds' Christmas Carol." Sister Jeanette's original make-believe for the small children, "Pink Tulips," was a special favorite last year.

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BEFORE WRITING YOUR CHECK

Apologetically, but firmly we ask
1) please take out your October Calendar
2) please note new these corrections on
royalty rates appearing for Dramatists
Play Service titles on page 4:

Reduced	From:	To:
Father Malachy's Miracle	\$25	\$20
Heaven Can Wait	25	20
Ladies in Retirement	50 - 25	35 - 25

HOLIDAY WEEKEND AND DECEMBER'S CALENDAR

The annual post-Thanksgiving meeting of the National Theater Conference will be held in New York Nov. 24-25-26. Chief place on the agenda is given to entertainment of returning veterans.

In addition to representing NCTC at these sessions we hope to exchange visits with Sister Mary Donatus, C.I.M., of Immaculata College, Pa., and Father Donohue and Father Schroeder of Loras College who plan short but busy stays in New York.

The December Calendar perforce must go to bed early. If you will cooperate by sending us your news items by November 18 we shall be grateful. It will be a radio issue. Tell us your broadcasting plans.

FOR THE LIBRARY

From Sister M. Peter, O.P., come copies of Rosary College publications "Fuss in Boots" and "Christmas on the Village Square," both Gheon translations made at Rosary. Mrs. Wyatt has added Ms. copies of two more children's plays, "The Lost Dryad" and "Christmas Play." Agnes Loughlin, who has contributed a copy of her choric adaptation of "End and Beginning," the Mary Queen of Scots drama, to our shelves, promises a streamlined version of Violet Clifton's "Sanctity" for a unit setting. Miss Loughlin directs drama at College Misericordia, Penna.

THE THEATER'S SHARE

The Treasury Department sends us a reminder that the non-professional theater will present 250,000 productions viewed by millions this season, and a request that our theaters offer to devote at least one performance to buyers of extra War Bonds.

CATCHING UP ON OCTOBER

Catholic Theater Guild of Richmond welcomed Lillian Santucci back to its ranks after her summer at CU by giving her the direction of "Jumpin' Jupiter." Performances Oct. 6 and 7 at Women's Club of Richmond.

Detroit's Catholic Theater produced "Murder in a Nunnery" for full houses Oct. 8 - 15 and sold standing room the last five nights. For four performances of "Five Little Peppers" the Children's Stage had 700 more orders than it could fill.

St. Catherine's High School Players of Racine built good-will for future ticket sales with an Open House for their adult friends on Oct. 18. By invitation only. Between scheduled one-act plays the guests learned the secret of three-minute scene shifts. Longest scene change on the Players' record is five minutes, including "Liberty Jones."

Mount Carmel Academy presented "Sally Sodalite" at the recent State Sodality Convention in Kansas.

CHRISTMAS PLAYS (Cont. from Page 1.)

Of the short plays, Msgr. R.H. Benson's "The Nativity" and Laurence Housman's "Bethlehem" stay close to the Christmas story. Lady Gregory's "The Traveling Man" is a miracle play, and Kenneth Goodman's "Dust of the Road," a morality. Both Sister M. Donatus, C.I.M., in "The King's Jongleur" (3 acts) and Richard Sullivan in "Our Lady's Tumbler" have dramatized the jongleur legend. An allegory, "The Desert Shall Rejoice" and a sentimental comedy, "Christmas at Home" are set in modern America.

For small children there are "The Enchanted Christmas Tree" by Percival Wilde, which is included in the Appleton Book of Christmas Plays, and, in Ms. Mrs. Wyatt's "Christmas Play." "Why the Chimes Rang" and "Good King Wenceslaus" are old favorites of many.

"A Christmas Mystery", published with musical score, places the burden of the evening on the glee club, while the actors portray in pantomime the familiar scenes of shepherds, kings, Angels, crib.

If your medium is radio, "Christmas - 1943", based on the Pope's Christmas letter to the world, is timely and easy to produce.

